

Story 1139 (1974 Tape 11

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kaza, Yozgat Province

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The Muhtar¹ More Cruel in Death Than in Life

There was a village which had a very cruel muhtar. He used to insult the people of that village; sometimes he would curse them, too, and there were even times when he would beat them. This went on for years, and the villagers felt helpless before this muhtar.

There finally came a time, however, when the residents of that village decided that they had to take a stand against this man. They gathered to discuss their problem, and one of them said, "Let us go and talk to our muhtar. Why should we have to continue to put up with his cruelty? He has been muhtar here for twenty to thirty years, and for all that time we have suffered his misuse. He should improve some in his behavior to us." Before the meeting ended they elected a committee to go and inform the muhtar of their views.

The committee went to see the muhtar. They said, "Muhtar, you have for a long while been offensive and cruel to us. Now that you are growing old, why don't you begin to show a

¹ The muhtar is the head man in a village or town mahalle. Elected by the people, he is sometimes the only elected official with whom villagers have contact. All other officials whom they see may be appointees of various federal ministries.

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little respect and goodwill toward us from now on?"

"Is that so? I really respect all of you.² From now on I shall show only my goodwill to you. If I have been cruel to you in the past, I shall give you this satisfaction for that. When I die, I give you permission to put a rope around my neck and drag my dead body through the streets.

Accepting this statement of the muhtar, the committee said, "May God be pleased with you, and may your work go well. They then went and told the rest of the villagers, "Everything went well in our meeting with the muhtar. We have his word that from now on he will not be abusive or cruel toward us

After the villagers had left, the muhtar called his son to him and said, "I have just promised those people that from now on I shall no longer curse them or beat them. I promised to show my goodwill toward them. One thing I wish to make certain about, however. After I die, if they tie a rope around my neck and drag my body through the streets, go at once to the public prosecutor in the nearest town and report their behavior to him."

After a few more years had passed, the muhtar became ill and died. Remembering what he had promised them, the villagers

² The literal Turkish expression used here by the narrator is, "You have a place on my head."

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said, "Oh! Now it is our turn! Bring the rope at once!" And as they rushed toward the muhtar's house, they kept saying, "Oh, you scoundrel!" They tied the rope around the neck of the dead muhtar and they began dragging his body through all of the streets

In the meantime the muhtar's son ran to the public prosecutor in the nearby town. He said, "Prosecutor, the villagers tied a rope around my father's neck, and they are dragging him through the streets. They are killing my father!"

The prosecutor immediately went to the village accompanied by a troop of rural police.³ He saw at once that the man had been dead for some time; there were many wounds and signs of blows on his body. He had all of the villagers arrested by police and taken to a local jail. There they were beaten left without food or water.

In the prison the villagers talked among themselves about their situation. One of them said, "The dead body of that scoundrel is even more cruel to us than his live body was!"

³ There are no rural police as such. Law and order in rural areas is maintained by army units turned over to the Ministry of Interior. They still wear their army uniforms, but in their new role they are known as gendarmes.